

Toward a Better Future

*“Human beings,
by changing the inner attitudes of their minds,
can change the outer aspects of their lives.”*

—William James (1842-1910)



This is the hope, the promise, that adult education students cling to – that by improving their education, they will be able to transform their lives and their family's future.

Yes, getting a better education often is about making more money. But it is so much more than that. Education opens the door to self-fulfillment and opportunity. It enables families to live the American Dream. It sets an example for the next generation and lays a foundation upon which to build.

To call attention to the importance of adult education, Gov. Mike Huckabee has proclaimed next week Adult Education Week in Arkansas and Wednesday as GED Pride Day. Since the “foundation of democracy is based upon an educated citizenry,” the governor says in the proclamation, “education should be made available to people of all ages.”

The governor cites several reasons for adults to return to school: “To pursue further education, to enter or advance in the job market, or to enhance their personal and family lives.”

When Alejandra Reyes made the commitment to get her GED, she was driven by two factors – the necessity of getting a better job and the need to show her son the importance of finishing school. After earning her Arkansas High School Diploma at the Russellville Adult Education Center, Alejandra went on to work on an associate's degree in early childhood education and was looking even farther down the road to a nursing degree. By proving that education provides more choices in life, she set an example not only for her son but for others struggling to stay in school or make ends meet. Alejandra's advice to others in her shoes is to persevere and never lose hope that there is a better future.

Thousands of Arkansans follow Alejandra's advice every year as they commit to improving their life, and that of their family, through education. More than two-thirds of the 37,102 full-time adult education students in 2004-05 (those enrolled in 12 hours or more of instruction) ranged in age from 19-44. Many of these students are parents whose ability to provide for their children has been restricted by their lack of education.

For many of these students, their goals may seem a long way off. Seventeen percent of the full-time students – 6,294 to be exact – started back to school at a first- to third-grade level; 44 percent – or 16,276 students – are at a fourth- to eighth-grade level.

The good news is that their perseverance is paying off. Regardless of their skill level, Arkansas adult education students continue to exceed national performance averages, and 86 percent of the 8,202 Arkansans who took the GED in 2004-05 passed (the national pass rate was 71 percent).

Because of their hard work and sacrifice, they are achieving the goals that started them on this path. Of those 2004-05 students responding to a survey, 71 percent who had listed getting a job as their reason for enrolling in adult education had accomplished that goal. And 85 percent who wanted to get a better job did so. Of the adults surveyed who came to adult education in preparation for college, 72 percent reported they had gone on for more schooling.

Is the effort worth it? Alejandra would say yes. Not only is she doing work that is fulfilling and challenging, she is better able to provide for her family. Because of her dedication, her son now has a better appreciation and understanding of the doors education can open.

Adult education has given thousands of Arkansans hope – for themselves, their children, and future generations of their families.